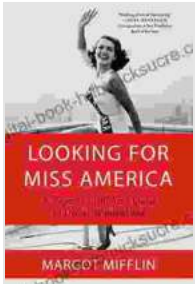


# Pageant's 100-Year Quest to Define Womanhood: A Long and Winding Journey



## Looking for Miss America: A Pageant's 100-Year Quest to Define Womanhood by Margot Mifflin

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

Language	: English
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Screen Reader	: Supported
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For a century, pageants have been a global phenomenon, captivating audiences with their displays of beauty, talent, and poise. These competitions have been the subject of much debate and controversy, with critics arguing that they objectify women and perpetuate harmful stereotypes. However, pageants have also been praised for their ability to empower women and provide them with opportunities for personal growth. In this article, we will explore the complex history of pageants and their evolving role in defining womanhood.

### The Early Years: The Search for the Ideal Woman

The first modern pageant, the Miss America Pageant, was held in 1921. At the time, the competition was organized by a group of businessmen who

were looking to attract tourists to Atlantic City, New Jersey. The pageant was originally called the "Inter-City Beauty Contest," and it was judged based on physical appearance alone. The first winner, Margaret Gorman, was an 18-year-old college student who was described as "the perfect American woman."

In the early years, pageants were dominated by a narrow and idealized vision of femininity. Contestants were expected to be beautiful, well-spoken, and have a wholesome moral character. They were judged on their physical attributes, their poise, and their ability to represent their country. This emphasis on external beauty and traditional values reflected the social expectations of the time.

## **The Rise of Feminism and the Challenge to Traditional Beauty Standards**

In the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement began to challenge traditional beauty standards and the objectification of women. This led to a number of changes in the way that pageants were organized and judged. In 1968, the Miss America Pageant dropped its swimsuit competition, and in 1972, the Miss Universe Pageant began to award prizes for intelligence and achievement. These changes reflected a growing awareness of the importance of women's minds and accomplishments.

However, pageants continued to be criticized for their emphasis on physical appearance. In 1994, the Miss America Pageant introduced a "lifestyle and fitness" competition, which was designed to showcase contestants' physical fitness and healthy lifestyles. This move was met with mixed

reactions, with some critics arguing that it was still too focused on body image.

## **Pageants in the 21st Century: A New Era of Inclusivity and Empowerment**

In recent years, pageants have begun to evolve once again, with a new emphasis on inclusivity and empowerment. In 2001, the Miss Universe Pageant crowned its first black winner, Leila Lopes of Angola. In 2019, the Miss America Pageant crowned its first lesbian winner, Nia Franklin. These victories represent a significant shift in the way that pageants are perceived and the values that they promote.

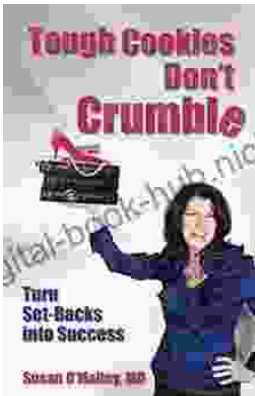
Today, pageants are no longer just about beauty. They are also about celebrating diversity, empowering women, and providing them with a platform to speak out on important issues. Contestants are judged on their intelligence, their talents, and their ability to inspire others. They are not just expected to be beautiful; they are expected to be role models.

Pageants have come a long way in the past century. They have evolved from competitions that objectified women to events that celebrate diversity, empower women, and provide them with a platform to speak out on important issues. While there is still room for improvement, pageants are slowly but surely moving in the right direction. They are becoming more inclusive, more diverse, and more empowering. And as they continue to evolve, they will undoubtedly continue to play a role in shaping the way that we define womanhood.

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